

Signs

&

Portents

The Thorn of the Ancestors is very, very upset. Call yourself a friend to the young all you wish, you who rule in thunder, but Shackle-Smasher sees no boundaries of nation, only the endless war of the strong against the weak. The strong sometimes pretend that the weak threaten them, that they are beset on all sides by enemies and only by crushing any who dissent can they survive. Be careful. Punishment may find you yet.

The vision shifts into a red snake, which is also a red bird at the same time in a way that makes no sense when you think about it but is quite obvious in the moment. The birdsnake flyslithers around in a space set up for duelling, ropes and posts laid out in a circle. Then this incongruous and entirely unrelated interjection into your vision ends.

***A friend of Irra Harrah, Spring Eternal
rewards their agents in Anvil***

A Dawnish knight balances precariously at the narrow tip of a mountain. They reach up into the night sky and gather the stars together in their hands. You hear the twinkling of celestial bells and chimes, and a flurry of red feathers obscure your vision...

You blink, and the knight stands proudly before you, holding a pool of twinkling lights in their cupped palms. Looking closer you begin to make out shapes in the light - but before they can fully take form you feel a rush of energy, and your feet carry you away.

***Ser Kay de Revoile, a Dawnish noble
Brings a pouch of stars, tulpas, to Anvil on Friday***

"Long ago, in the stars and the snows and the swamps, Heroism was born. It was a mysterious and uncertain thing at first, diving into a future that it could not truly know, only catch glimpses of through the mists. We shepherded the Heroes forward, those of us who live in Mystery, spying out the patterns of what was to come and sending them in the right direction, to victory or death. Then the people of the horse came, and their culture came with them, and Crows began to circle. They were all so certain that they knew the answers, that theirs was the truest and only way, and they dismissed the fog of the future, whether they meant to or not.

How do we exist in a world where only certainty is valued? How do we explain to them that they do not have all the answers, that we can only spy out the vaguest outlines of what is to come? How do we put Mysticism back into the world again?"

This monologue is delivered to you by a red snake who is also a bird. For some strange reason it is twisting and squeezing a wet cloth, causing water to spill onto the ground. It is quite incongruous.

***Mystics from the Aviary of Ishal in Wintermark
seek direction on their future***

A great leviathan rises from the sea and bellows loudly, erect and looking to the sky, before collapsing in a putrescent heap upon an endless bleached white beach, bright red seabirds circling above and squawking relentlessly. An orc claws its way free from the bloated corpse of the great sea beast, bedecked in a blur of rags and gore. The orcs hand is extended in smiling friendship, but when you look into their mouth you see naught but a black void and row upon row of chipped knives.

***A murderous Siakha cultist, formerly of the Grendel
Living inside a whale***

See as they march towards the heart of the Empire, a people reborn, seeking a new beginning. They ask for a great sacrifice, but what of the things they offer? Will they be enough? Will the people of the Horse support the freedom of the ones who once killed the greatest of them? Will they - your vision is interrupted by a red bird that flaps into your vision and stares at you, making odd bell-like noises, before flying away.

A group of Lasambrians offers a peace treaty to the Empire

A silver bird (or is it red?) flies in tight circles through the sky. It sings a mournful song, and you are the only one who hears its tune. Snatches of lyrics drift through your head:

"Do not pass me by..."

"Hunt the Hare of Victory..."

"Bleak winter's grasp..."

The bird is struck by an arrow, and tumbles to the ground below. You lose sight of her. Where has she gone? Where is she buried? Surely someone must know...

***The lost songs of Elayne Silverlark, old Dawnish troubadour
The musicians of Anvil have written new tunes to rediscovered lyrics***

"It is concluded?"

"It is. We now operate as the City of Bond and Bar."

"Excellent. This should provide far more opportunities for us to exercise our will. The mortal realm is full of people seeking compensation."

"Are we letting anyone out of the prisons?"

"Of course not. We've reorganised, not lost our minds."

These voices are heard over the incongruous image of a red snake, slithering round and round in circles. You know somehow that this snake is unrelated to the voices.

The Lictors, creatures of Autumn, have reinvented themselves

A red snake lives in a land of wind and flame. Its role is to look after the dead, but instead it swallows their jewels and gold.

It slithers its way to Anvil, to a meeting of white-coloured ravens. The ravens welcome it into their flock, and then peck at it again and again until it still and unmoving in a pool of blood the same colours as its scales.

From the shadows, a silver snake watches all this. He had planned to kill the red snake himself, but seeing the white ravens do his work for him, he advances towards them...

***A funeral director from Faraden visits Anvil
They are followed by a Faraden vigilante, with a strong belief in Justice***

You are a strange creature dancing across shimmering technicolour pools. Your feet turn to talons, and a snake's tongue flickers out between your lips. You are shedding, leaving red feathers and scales in your wake. They ripple across a thousand overlapping images - a vast whale, a pocket full of stars, a pile of ash, a bloodied bear, and so on and on.

*You are singing a song, the same 4 words repeated: "Reflections in Night's groves."
Not your name, not quite...*

In one pool you catch sight of yourself - a strange creature dancing across shimmering technicolour pools - and the vision begins again, and so on and on.

***This vision is about this plenipotentiary!
And the red herald who has woven a deeper mystery through the visions.***

Deep beneath the dark trees, wrapped in shade and fog, a figure lays in wait. Shining, glorious sunbeams march through the trees, piercing the mists as they pass. The figure eyes them warily. Can they be trusted? Are they a chance for salvation at last?

One of the column stops for a moment, watching intently as a bright red viper curls around the trunk of an old, stout tree. In its wake, the bark is gone, and soon the tree withers and dies.

As the warriors' golden light fades once again into the dark of the forest, the figure withdraws. Returning to the edge of the forest, where trees have been cleared to make way for rows upon rows of climbing vines. As it steps out from under the trees, some of the darkness of the woods follows the figure, wrapping it in unnatural shade, obscuring any details.

The day is bright, the leaves a rich and verdant green. The breeze would be pleasant, were it not for the faint hint of miasma in the air. The figure, cloaked in night, stretches out a hand and gently plucks one juicy, fat berry from a vine. It ponders for a moment, holding the berry up to the light...

Then crushes it between thumb and forefinger, the juice pouring down into the shadows.

***A druj double-agent offers an opportunity
to imperial spies in the Sarangrave***

A crimson bird, feathers like dripping blood, circles and watches two great beasts fighting below - manticores: one ancient, bones almost sticking out from sinew; and one young, though pale white and snarling. The two barely trade blows, dancing around each other, before the white one turns away with an arrogant flick of its head. The ancient one, bloodstains around its mouth, lets out a mocking laugh, and the pale one drops to the ground as a chain around its neck tightens, throttling the great beast until its life is snuffed out.

Higher now, the bird swirls and circles and spirals up - below a humanoid figure, too small to make out clearly, takes the chain from the fallen beast's neck and turns it over and over in their hands, as if trying to figure out its secrets - and from the side, the ancient one now approaches it, not as a predator sneaking up on prey, but openly, brazen, paw outstretched as if to shake a hand.

***Agramant offers a deal to Dawnish
Something about “circlet of the swan”***

The Locks are finally beginning to open again. Or will they close? He who betrayed the great betrayer will now face a choice himself - and potentially face his own betrayal. Sorry, you who are born in ash. This is the nature of the City you have aligned yourself with.

As the vision comes to a close, you suddenly and jarringly receive the impression of a small red bird flapping around in your vision. It has small metal bands worn around its claws, as one might in the League to signal allegiance. Then it is gone.

***The City of Locks (realm of Basileus Flint) is realigned
Thanks to the involvement of Grandmaster Ashborn Trosk***

You sit in the audience of a round circus tent. At the centre of the stage a naga with bright red feathers announces seven performers:

"A Grendel pirate, a Sumaah priest, a Sarcophan undertaker, a Jotun jarl, all rubbing shoulders. Sparks are bound to fly! But you already knew about that, didn't you?"

The red naga does a little pirouette, before continuing:

"What about the others then? A stargazer from Jarm! An orc academic from the Commonwealth! And an Axou drug dealer with a face that seems oddly familiar...

Who will win? Does winning even matter? Who's to say!"

***Seven foreigners and barbarians visit the Empire
To participate in a grand Summer Realm Debate
Hosted by Jaheris and Eleonaris***

A giddy man returns from battle, eager to show off to his fellows. He is bedecked head to toe in finest silks and wools, arms and neck clasped in silver and gold, a gleaming sword with pommel of intricate laced gilding swinging freely from his hip. As he talks his eyes begin to water and his knees buckle, following by gasping and choking for air. He falls to his knees while clutching at his throat, then begins to vomit, bringing up jewels, gold chains, all manner of valuable trinkets and items, all slicked with blood, him sobbing and weeping the whole while, as his tunic begins to unravel. First the hem comes undone, then rents appear, lacelike, working their way up towards his chest and armpits. A woman, with fearful look upon her face at the grotesque picture before him pulls him to his chest, and they both cry together in great heaving motions.

***A wintermark maggot visits Anwil to brag about some stolen loot
They are followed by their partner who worries for their soul***

You briefly see a richly-dressed Herald of the Autumn Realm shaking his fist impotently at a church before the vision shifts weirdly. A red snake slithers across your vision, and you realise it is coiling on top of a mound of coins of little value. It looks at you and winks.

Sanwar Isk, Autumn Herald
The auction of the Loom of Spells